

It is impossible NOT to encounter the Risen Christ in this expansive volume, small in number of pages, but huge in content. Janet opens doors to practices, spiritual disciplines, types of prayer, and images of God that nourish and fuel the life of a disciple.

✠ **LEE NAGEL**, *Executive Director, National Conference for Catechetical Leadership*

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This book is a powerful guide for us all, whether we're catechists, pastoral ministers, or anyone seeking God.

✠ **BILL HUEBSCH**, *author of Whole Community Catechesis in Plain English and director of pastoralplanning.com*

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Wonderfully practical and spiritually enriching. The section on prayer alone is worth the price of the book.

✠ **NEIL PARENT**, *Past Executive Director of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership; Past Project Director, Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership, National Association for Lay Ministry*

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This book presents spiritual insights and wisdom that will benefit everyone engaged in Christian ministry.

✠ **JOHN ROBERTO**, *Lifelong Faith Associates, editor, Lifelong Faith Journal*

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Janet has captured the essential element that sets apart a witness who transmits the faith through invitation into relationship with Jesus Christ from a mere teacher.

✠ **BRIAN A. LEMOI**, *Executive Director, Department of Evangelization & Lifelong Faith Formation, Diocese of St. Petersburg*

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This is an amazing book, amazing in its content, amazing in its format, and amazing in its clear and 100% reader-friendly style. It is a treasure chest for everyone engaged in catechesis in any way!

✠ **MELANNIE SVOBODA, SND**, *author of Everyday Epiphanies and When the Rain Speaks*

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This is a delightful gift to the catechetical community and to all who are interested in spiritual formation.

✠ **DANIEL S. MULHALL**, *Catechist, Author: Let God Build the House, 8 Steps for Effective Pastoral Planning*

A catechist has been described as one who facilitates communication between people and the mystery of God and with one another (GDC 156). Janet does just that, and she gently and wisely leads us to do the same.

☛ **SUZANNE NELSON**, *Adult Faith Formation Coordinator,  
St. Raphael Parish, Rockville, MD*

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Truly accessible, inspiring, and practical, this is a critical resource for catechists who know the heart of their vocation is who they are as disciples of Jesus.

☛ **DR. CAROLE EIPERS**, *Vice President, Executive Director of Catechetics  
at William H. Sadlier, Inc. and author of Catechist 101: Wade Don't Dive*

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I hope Parish Catechetical Leaders would use this book as prayer for their meetings, as a catechist retreat, or an evening of prayer.

☛ **MARY ANN RONAN** *retired Catechetical Leader and Past President  
of the Board of Directors for the National Conference of Catechetical Leaders*

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Janet beautifully explores the tradition of Christian spirituality and the practices of prayer in clear and practical ways.

☛ **DANIEL J. PIERSON**, *founder of eCatechist.com & faithAlivebooks.com*

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This is a gem of a book, leading us to introspection about our spirituality, our holiness, and our journey to live up to what we became at baptism.

☛ **DR. LORRAINE S. DELUCA**, *Director, Evangelization and Catechesis,  
Diocese of Beaumont*

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Through the discussion questions and action steps in each chapter, Janet invites readers to go deeper in a way that is achievable for any adult.

☛ **PAM COSTER**, *Executive Director, Charis Ministries*

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I have not seen a better history, explanation, guide, or assistant than this book offers. You'll want to read it more than once!

☛ **ANNE COMEAUX**, *Past President of the National Conference for Catechetical  
Leadership and former director of the catechetical office in the Archdiocese of  
Galveston-Houston and the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston*

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A practical invitation to companionship in prayer and to grow in holiness, this book makes a perfect gift for catechists of all ages.

☛ **JOSÉ M. AMAYA**, *Director of Faith Formation,  
Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA*



*The* ESSENTIAL CATECHIST'S BOOKSHELF

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THE  
Spirituality  
OF THE CATECHIST

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FEEDING YOUR SOUL,  
GROWING *in* FAITH,  
SHARING *with* OTHERS

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Janet Schaeffler, OP

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## *Dedication*

To my mom and dad, who modeled for me  
a trusting, compassionate spirituality

and to the Adrian Dominican Sisters,  
who continue to nurture a prophetic  
visionary spirituality centered  
in community and care.

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# INTRODUCTION

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Why a book on the spirituality of the catechist—all catechists, including those who minister with adults of all ages and stages of life, and those who minister with youth and children? We may feel that we need books on “what to teach,” books with many and varied ideas of methods and activities, and books about how to facilitate a catechetical session. We do!

Yet something comes before these crucial components. Who we are speaks much louder than all that we say. We are called to be catechists, to echo and re-echo Jesus Christ and the good news that Jesus taught and lived.

We cannot give what we do not have. If someone asked us for five dollars, could we give it if we didn’t have it? If someone asked us to listen, could we do that if we’ve never slowed down enough to be attentive to what others have to say?

We give what we have. As faith-filled Christians, we have been gifted with so much. As committed disciples, we are challenged to act. As dedicated catechists, we are called to journey with others. The depth and richness of our spirituality is the

foundation for who we are, for all that we do. We live authentically and walk generously with others because of our spirituality.

We are called, especially because of our ministry as catechists, to grow and deepen our spirituality. “Like all the faithful, catechists are called to holiness. Because of their ministry and mission, however, the call to holiness has a particular urgency” (*National Directory for Catechesis*, 54.b.8). What a gift! What a challenge!

This book is designed to accompany each of us on our journey in spirituality: thoughts and insights, questions for reflection (and conversation), and suggestions for things to do. We begin by looking at the reality of spirituality, with a few of its foundations and characteristics, then moving to some unique ways that spirituality is fostered and lived in our lives as catechists. In the words of the poet Mary Oliver regarding ways to live life: “Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.”

*Janet Schaeffler, OP*



# What is spirituality?

Have you ever found yourself thinking that “spirituality” is not really a part of your life, that it’s something for someone else? Or do you sometimes view spirituality as only a part of your life, the part reserved for prayer, liturgy, Scripture reading, and other religious practices? These practices of prayer (and many more) are certainly an integral and indispensable part of spirituality, but is spirituality more than prayer life, more than spiritual practices?

We might view these practices as habits that help us step away for a while from the rest of our lives, to “escape” from the parts of our lives that aren’t “spiritual.” We may even view the “worldly” parts of our life as decadent, as unholy. What, then, is spirituality? The following story might provide some insights.

The monks in an ancient monastery were losing their spirit, becoming ornery and irritable with one another. The abbot sought the guidance of a wise rabbi, who responded, “I have no advice. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is among you.” The abbot conveyed this message to his fellow monks, adding, “I don’t know what he meant.” The monks began to ponder: Did he mean the Messiah is here, one of us? Who could it be? The abbot who has led us? Brother James,



who is always late, yet exudes kindness? Brother Richard, who is so passive, yet always appears when help is needed? Of course, each monk said to himself, the hermit didn't mean me; I'm just an ordinary person.

With these thoughts running through their minds, the monks began to treat each other with exceptional reverence, kindness, and care on the off chance that one among them might be the Messiah. Because there was the possibility that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to regard themselves with extraordinary respect too.

"The Messiah is among you." There is no limit to the presence of God with us; therefore, everyone, every occurrence, everything is a part of our spirituality.

The Old Testament reminds us: "Where can I go from your spirit? From your presence, where can I flee?" No matter where the psalmist envisions, he realizes "even there your hand guides me, your right hand holds me fast" (Psalm 139:7-10).

In the New Testament, Jesus says to us: "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Spirituality encompasses everything about us. Spirituality is holistic and integrated within the totality of our lives. Because Jesus became incarnate, became one of us, every ounce of creation is holy. Everything is held close in God's gracious embrace.

Every dimension of our lives is touched by our spirituality:

- our worries and concerns about the future
- the ways we respond to the needy in our midst
- the busyness of today's life
- the disappointments and challenges of life
- grieving the loss of a loved one
- the joy of birth and new life
- living faithfully the single life

- our interactions and interconnectedness with family, relatives, friends, coworkers
- the struggle of living with illness
- navigating congested traffic
- living as a faithful citizen
- integrating our sexuality
- caring for others and for the beauty of creation
- making decisions—the simple ones and the complex ones
- the delight of celebration times, etc.

During an interview with Krista Tippett on her radio show, “On Being,” Sylvia Boorstein remarked, “Spirituality doesn’t look like sitting down and meditating. Spirituality looks like folding the towels in a sweet way and talking kindly to the people in the family even though you’ve had a long day. It’s enfolded into the act of parenting. You fold the towels in a sweet way. It doesn’t take extra time.”

#### **A DEFINITION OF SPIRITUALITY**

There are numerous (in reality, unlimited) definitions of spirituality. What a gift this is, because each definition helps us to understand and appreciate this mystery in a distinct way.

Years ago, I heard one description of spirituality that resonates with the reality that spirituality encompasses the totality of our lives: “Spirituality is who we are and what we do because of what we believe.” There is nothing left out of our spirituality. The way we live our spirituality is influenced by our worldview, by the beliefs we hold dear, by the beliefs that have become a part of our lives.

Over the years as I’ve reflected upon that definition, I have added another component: “Spirituality is who we are and what we do because of what we believe and because of what

we've experienced.”

Our beliefs don't just happen. Our beliefs are a result of our experiences. What have you experienced that has formed your beliefs? Probably many things, but one of the core experiences that influences our beliefs (and all that we are) is our experience of God. Not simply our *knowledge about* God, but our *experience of* God.

- When have you realized—and experienced—God's lavish love?
- When have you been touched by—experienced—God's gentle care?
- When have you wondered at—and experienced—God's imaginative creativity?
- When have you appreciated—and experienced—God's unconditional acceptance?
- When have you been nudged by—experienced—God's disquieting challenge?

Our study, reflection, and conversations have told us *about* God. When and where in our daily lives have we *experienced* the God that we know about? These experiences of God deepen who we are. These experiences form our beliefs, which then impact all that we are, all that we do.

At times, some people might say they haven't or don't experience God. Perhaps it's not that we haven't, but, rather, that we aren't aware of the times and ways we have! Our lives can get so crowded and busy that we don't give ourselves time to be aware, to experience the closeness of our God. One of our roles as catechists, while deepening God-awareness in our own lives, is to walk with people, encouraging and empowering them to become attuned to the experience of God in their lives.

## **A DIVERSITY OF SPIRITUALITIES**

People often speak of differences in spirituality related to who we are and our life stages (lay spirituality, married spirituality, the spirituality of the single person, spirituality in or of the workplace, etc.). Throughout the centuries, we have realized that there are also various expressions of spirituality flowing from some of our great saints and religious orders (Dominican, Franciscan, Benedictine, Augustinian, Jesuit, Carmelite, to name a few). We also recognize that there are distinctive spiritualities within various cultures (Celtic spirituality, Hispanic spirituality, Native American spirituality, etc.). Diverse spiritualities can also be witnessed in various movements or groups within today's church (Charismatic spirituality, Cursillo spirituality, etc.).

Each of these spiritualities is unique, but that does not mean that they are contradictory. They all arise from the same rich heritage of Christianity; they all aim at the same goal: to live and love as Jesus did. The difference is a matter of emphasis. Within the various spiritualities, each focuses on specific, and often different, elements of living discipleship, for instance:

- hospitality
- seeing God in all things
- commitment to the poor
- contemplation in action
- devotion to truth
- living simply
- living and promoting community
- prophetic signs in the world
- living and bringing compassion to the world

### **YOUR SPIRITUALITY INITIALS**

As we look at the spiritualities flowing from some of the saints and religious orders throughout history, we find initials after the names of people who belong to these religious communities: O.P. for Dominicans (Order of Preachers), S.J. for Jesuits (Society of Jesus), O.S.B. for Benedictines (Order of Saint Benedict), etc. The initials tell us that the spirituality of these individuals has been formed in large part by the spirituality of their founder and the spirituality of their community.

In reality, each of us has spirituality initials. You might be a H.F.C. (Husband, Father, Caregiver). Perhaps you are an A.D.T. (Aunt, Dreamer, Teacher). Your initials might be C-C.F. (Creation-centered Friend) or P.G.C. (Protector, Grandparent, Catechist). What are your spirituality initials, especially at this point in your life?

To determine your unique spirituality initials, take time to consider the people and experiences that have formed you throughout your life. What roles in your life are currently forming who you are? What has helped you realize that there is more to life than meets the eye?

Since all the experiences of our lives form our spirituality, our growth in spirituality is never-ending. A few years from now, because of changing experiences and roles in life, your spirituality initials might be very different from today.

### **SPIRITUALITY: CONTINUALLY COMING HOME**

Spirituality is the journey of coming home, of being home, of being one with our amazing God. Years ago when I was on Mackinac Island (between the upper and lower peninsulas of Michigan), a guide told us that no deer had ever resided there. One summer, several deer were brought over because people thought their presence might enhance this charming island.

But the following winter, when Lake Huron froze, the deer left the island and traveled back across the ice to the lower peninsula. They knew where home was; they needed to be rooted in home. Our journey of spirituality roots us where we need to be—at home with our God.

### **SPIRITUALITY OF CATECHISTS**

Flowing from these realities—the various expressions of spirituality in our tradition as well as our own formative experiences—we can ask the question: might there be a unique spirituality for catechists?

The gift and responsibility of being called to be a catechist enhance our experiences and help to form our beliefs and practices. Our ministry as catechists influences who we are and what we do, while, at the same time, calling and enabling us to grow in spirituality, probably in unique ways, ways we might never experience if we weren't catechists.

Spirituality can be considered from various viewpoints. Three aspects (among many) are foundational to all spirituality, empowering us to live as disciples day in and day out. These three aspects also energize the spirituality and ministry of who we are as catechists. (We will also continue to explore additional facets of these three aspects in the chapters to come.)

*1. Our own experiences of the paschal mystery:* The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was not something that happened only to Jesus. Jesus lived and experienced human life, suffered, and was raised to life because that is the life to which we are called: a life of human experience and relationships, sufferings, disappointments, losses, and grief, as well as the experience of peace-filled new beginnings, dreams, joys, precious moments, and glorious new life. God, through the resurrected

Christ and the Holy Spirit, is always with us throughout our journey of the paschal mystery.

As catechists, being ourselves rooted in this life of Jesus, we walk with others in their paschal mystery of life, supporting and guiding.

**2. *Letting God love us:*** We are called to serve, to wash feet. God reaches out to wash our feet first, to love us as we are. Created in the image and likeness of God, we are good. That is how God sees us, inviting us to believe in our goodness.

As catechists, because of our compassionate loving and service to others, adults, youth, and children experience God's love for them in a distinctive and tangible way.

**3. *Always more than me:*** It is difficult for the parts of a whole to fulfill the vision, the purpose, of the whole. One can't do it alone. We're always in this together. There is an African proverb that says, "Ubuntu. I am because we are." Your fears are mine; your searching and dreams are mine; our yearnings are common. The spirituality of each of us grows, thrives, and serves because we live it together.

As catechists, through our witnessing and teaching, we model unity for others, calling them to immerse themselves into the comfort and challenge of community.

### 🕉️ *Questions for reflection and discussion*

- What is your definition of spirituality?
- When and where have you experienced God?

- What are your spirituality initials? Who and what have influenced you? What has formed and molded you? Who and what have helped you to experience God? Who and what have helped you to realize that there is more to life than what meets the eye?
- As you reflect on your experiences as a catechist, in what ways have you grown and changed?
- How does your spirituality influence who you are as a catechist?

### ● *Things to do*

- Write down your spirituality initials. Periodically during prayer reflect on them. How do these facets of your life deepen your connection with God?
- Think about how your spirituality has changed over the years. Draw a timeline or a spiral, illustrating some of the changes.
- Decide upon a way to slow down so that you might be more aware of all the God-moments in your day.
- Make a plan for yourself. In what areas do you want to continue to grow? How will being a catechist help you?
- Each week choose a specific person to treat as though they were the Messiah. They are Christ among us, aren't they?